

Pat Burns Avenue

By Ivan Bulic and Joyce White,

Some think Pat Burns Avenue, in the north end of Gabriola, was named after the coach of the Montreal Canadiens. Others say the residential road commemorates 1930s millionaire rancher and founder of the Burns Meat empire.

But Pat Burns Avenue is named after Vancouver radio “hotline” broadcaster Pat Burns.

Vancouver developers, Les and Syd Harrison bought big chunks of Gabriola in the 1960s; planning to carve them into half-acre subdivisions. The 600 half-acre lots of Phase Six, at the northern end, would be the largest. Syd Harrison named most of the roads after friends who bought lots. He named one main road after Pat Burns.

In 1963 Pat Burns made his Vancouver debut on CJOR radio. He virtually created “hot-line” call -in radio and was known for his controversial opinions and gruff-voiced, combative style. He decried the dangers of Asian immigration, claimed unions were part of a communist plot, said homosexuals were depraved, and ridiculed woman who entered the workforce. He greeted his female callers with a characteristic “Go ahead doll!”

Meanwhile CJOR’s ratings soared as advertisers scrambled to buy spots on the “hot-line.”

Harrison hired Burns to promote his Gabriola lots at bargain-basement prices, even offering free flights over the island. Burns did such a good job that Harrison named Past Burns Avenue after him.

Burns, meanwhile, had offended so many listeners that he was fired by CJOR. His backers staged a rousing “free-speech” rally that attracted thousands of cheering supporters to Vancouver’s PNE Forum.



Burns, however, moved back to his native Montreal in 1965 where he resumed his hotline on English language CKGM radio and launched an anti-Quebecois campaign that infuriated French listeners. Quebec nationalists boycotted CKGM. Radicals threatened to bomb the station. Even Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson said Burns was inflaming French-English relations. Facing death threats, Burns returned to Vancouver, and to CJOR, where he resumed his hotline and crusaded to unseat NDP Premier Dave Barrett's "godless socialists."

In the 1980s, Burns moved to Canada-wide CKO talk radio while espousing causes such as western separatism. He later participated in a white supremacist conference with Canadian neo-Nazi Paul Fromm.

By the 1990s, Burns was reduced to broadcasting ads for low-cost glasses and used cars on Fraser Valley country music stations. Burns died in 1996. He was posthumously inducted into the Canadian broadcast industry hall of fame.

Meanwhile the Harrison brothers managed to subdivide much of their land in the Wildwood Estates and the Phase Four parcel off Berry Point Road before the Gabriola Planning Commission zoned the Island as "rural" in 1971 and stopped half-acre lot developments.

Shortly after his death a group of Pat Burns Avenue residents asked the provincial Ministry of Transportation to change the name to Madrona Road. So far, the Ministry appears to have no plans to implement any changes.

*Sources include **Gabriola Island Place Names, (1996), by Neil Aitken and Aula Bell, and **Gabriolore.ca.*****